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General Assembly
Fifty-fifth session

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Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 3rd meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 22 September 2000, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Rosenthal ..... (Guatemala)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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00-65359 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Election of a Vice-Chairman

1. **The Chairman** recalled that, at its previous meeting, the Committee had not been in a position to elect a Vice-Chairman from the Group of African States. He had since been informed that the Group had nominated Mr. Collen Vixen Kelapile (Botswana) for the post of Vice-Chairman. Since there were no other candidates for the post, he took it that the Committee wished to elect Mr. Collen Vixen Kelapile (Botswana) Vice-Chairman of the Committee.

2. *Mr. Collen Vixen Kelapile (Botswana) was elected Vice-Chairman by acclamation.*

Organization of work

3. **The Chairman** drew the Committee's attention to the proposed programme of work for the week of 25 to 29 September 2000. He noted, in particular, that the Under-Secretary-General for Management would brief delegations on the major issues to be considered by the Fifth Committee during the current session of the General Assembly.

4. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that it would be helpful to delegations if during the following week the Committee could also consider its programme of work for the first week of October.

5. **Mr. Ahounou** (Côte d'Ivoire) requested additional information on the briefing to be given by the Under-Secretary-General for Management the following week.

6. **Mr. Acakpo-Satchivi** (Secretary of the Committee) said that the Under-Secretary-General would brief delegations on those items on the Committee's agenda which, in his view, were of particular importance during the current session of the Assembly. They included such questions as the reform of the system of human resources management, the long-term capital master plan and information technology, on which the Under-Secretary-General would welcome the Committee's views, which would be taken into account when he subsequently prepared his statement on the items in question.

The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.

United Nations A/C.5/55/SR.4

General Assembly
Fifty-fifth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
11 October 2000

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Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 4th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 27 September 2000, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Rosenthal ..... (Guatemala)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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00-66062 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Organization of work

1. **The Chairman** recalled that, when the Fifth Committee had adopted its programme of work at its 2nd meeting, several delegations had asked for clarification of the reasons for the proposed sequencing of agenda items. The basic reason concerned the availability of documentation. The volume of documentation requested in other Main Committees, as well as the number of reports that must be considered by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) before being considered by the Fifth Committee, affected the timely issuance of documents and the date on which they would be ready for consideration by the Fifth Committee. The Secretariat would distribute a list indicating the status of preparedness of documentation, and the programme of work would be continually revised in the course of the session.

Agenda item 116: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations

Reports of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/54/960; A/55/34)

2. **Mr. Ouedraogo** (Chairman of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU)) introduced the annual report of JIU for 1999 (A/55/34) and its programme of work for 2000 and the preliminary list of potential reports for 2001 and beyond (A/54/960). While JIU had complied with article 10 of its statute by submitting annual reports to the competent organs of participating organizations, the consideration of those reports had varied from one organization to another. Although the General Assembly had decided, by its resolution 46/220, to consider the reports of JIU on a biennial basis, the Fifth Committee had considered three reports at the fifty-fourth session in order to clear up the backlog that had accumulated. Its decision to consider the report for 1999 at the current session appeared to signal its commitment to considering the Unit's reports in a more timely manner.

3. The annual report for 1999 included the information normally provided on the Unit's composition, its human and financial resources, measures to enhance its functioning and impact and its relations and cooperation with participating organizations. In addition, the current report focused on the follow-up on the Unit's reports and recommendations, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 54/16. Such follow-up would help to enhance the Unit's impact, since the latter depended on the implementation of the recommendations made by JIU and approved by the organizations concerned. Accordingly, 10 notes on the issue had been submitted to the secretariats of participating organizations (A/55/34, annex II). That exercise was being pursued in 2000 to obtain a clearer indication of whether the participating organizations had approved or rejected the Unit's recommendations, instead of merely taking note of them and leaving their implementation to the goodwill of the secretariats.

4. For the first time, the annual report contained, in annex I, a table showing the timing of the consideration of the Unit's reports since 1994. On average, the reports had been considered by the legislative organs one to three years after their issuance, and those organs seldom took specific decisions on the recommendations contained therein. JIU hoped that the follow-up exercise would improve the handling of its reports by the organizations concerned.

5. The Unit's programme of work for 2000 and preliminary listing of potential reports for 2001 and beyond (A/54/960) had been submitted pursuant to article 9 of its statute. Paragraph 1 of that article specified that, in preparing its programme of work, the Unit should take into account any requests of the competent organs of the organizations and suggestions received from the executive heads of the organizations and the relevant bodies of the United Nations system. However, such requests were rarely received from legislative organs, although suggestions had been made regularly by the secretariats, the Office of Internal Oversight Services and the Advisory Committee. Since the General Assembly played a central and universally accepted coordinating role for the entire United Nations system, it should be less reluctant to make requests in connection with the Unit's programme of work. In particular, he hoped that the Fifth Committee would provide guidance for the preparation of the programme of work for 2001. The Unit's flexibility and responsiveness to requests for the inclusion of emerging issues in its programme of work, to the extent that its limited resources allowed, was demonstrated by its agreement, at the express request of the Secretary-

General of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), to undertake a review of management and administration in that organization.

6. As the Secretary-General had indicated at the opening of the Millennium Assembly, the challenge currently before the Organization was to take action on the pledges made in the United Nations Millennium Declaration. The internal and external oversight bodies, whose primary mission was to help to enhance the effectiveness of the Organization's services and use of resources, must likewise adapt their programmes of work to reflect the priorities of the participating organizations and to assist them further in the exercise of their functions. That was a possible topic for the agenda of the forthcoming annual Tripartite Oversight Coordination meeting between the Board of Auditors, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and JIU. He would welcome the Fifth Committee's comments and guidance in that regard.

7. **Mr. Gaubert** (France), speaking on behalf of the European Union and the associated countries, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Malta, Poland and Romania, said that, in organizing its work and making optimum use of its resources, JIU should seek to set an example for the organizations of the United Nations system. He was pleased to note that the system of follow-up to the Unit's recommendations was being implemented, since it would help to orient the Unit's activities towards clear and measurable objectives for enhancing the Organization's effectiveness. He understood that the General Assembly, pursuant to its resolution 54/16, would conduct a detailed assessment of the operation of the follow-up system at its fifty-sixth session.

8. Many participating organizations were looking forward to the issuance of the Unit's report on planning, programming, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation in the United Nations system. However, a longer time period would be required for the proper assessment of the recently revised Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation. Lastly, he asked when the Unit would issue its report on the management of buildings, with specific reference to the United Nations Headquarters complex, considering that the General Assembly also had before it, at its current session, a capital master plan for the complete renovation of the complex.

9. **Mr. Hamidullah** (Bangladesh) said that the need for elaborate and effective oversight machinery in a system as large as that of the United Nations was indisputable and that JIU was an important component of that machinery. He recalled that the Committee's attention had been drawn, the preceding year, to the recommendations of the Conference on Financial Oversight and Accountability in the United Nations System, held in Princeton in 1998. Many of the recommendations concerning JIU remained valid. For example, it had been recommended that the comments of the executive heads of participating organizations should be included as an annex to the Unit's reports; that JIU should clearly distinguish between recommendations requiring approval by legislative organs and recommendations not requiring such approval; that an independent review panel should examine the qualifications of the persons nominated by regional groups to serve as inspectors; that the Unit's budget estimates should be submitted to the Secretary-General and subsequently routed through the Advisory Committee and the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) before being sent to the General Assembly for approval; that the number of inspectors should be halved, without affecting equitable geographical distribution and reasonable rotation; that the Unit's Chairman should be elected for a single non-renewable term at a higher level, similar to that of the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services, and that the Chairman should be held accountable for compliance with the Unit's statute, standards, guidelines and procedures; and that JIU should make frequent use of informal notes and confidential letters, as envisaged in its statute.

10. He welcomed the inclusion in the Unit's annual report for 1999 of information on when the participating organizations had submitted JIU reports to their legislative organs. That was an important first step in the implementation of the system of follow-up endorsed by the General Assembly. However, the need for implementation of approved recommendations was not clearly reflected in the report. With respect to the finding that legislative organs took up the respective JIU reports one to three years after their issuance, he asked for clarification of the reasons for that delay. He also asked what subjects had been addressed in the ten notes which the Unit had issued in 1999 (A/55/34, para. 18). He noted that only one confidential letter had been issued during the reporting period; greater use should be made of such letters. He would like to know

how many notes and confidential letters had been issued in previous reporting periods.

11. **Mr. Soulama** (Burkina Faso) said that the Unit's report reflected its efforts to improve its relations with participating organizations and other oversight bodies. JIU should be provided with adequate resources so that it could play its important role in enhancing the efficiency of the United Nations system. In particular, chapter VI, sections A and B, of the report called for a response by the Fifth Committee. More resources should be allocated to JIU so that it could expand its secretariat. With respect to the listing of potential reports for 2001 and beyond, he asked what JIU intended to do with respect to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

12. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) said that his delegation attached great importance to effective oversight in the United Nations system and to the effective functioning of JIU, which was an important component of the culture of accountability that was essential to the Organization, as were performance-based management principles.

13. With respect to paragraph 11 of the Unit's annual report (A/55/34), he asked why JIU had experienced such high staff turnover and what difficulties it faced in trying to fill the resulting vacancies. While paragraph 14 indicated that JIU had made improvements in productivity, only seven reports had been issued in 1999, whereas nine reports had been issued in 1998. He asked why the number of reports had declined and how that could be considered an improvement.

14. His delegation shared the European Union's traditional position in favour of benchmarks and performance indicators and believed that JIU should make use of them, thereby serving as an example to the rest of the United Nations system. He asked what kinds of benchmarks and performance indicators were already being implemented within the Unit and what the results had been thus far. He agreed with the representative of Bangladesh that JIU should use confidential letters as a valuable means of conveying its messages and achieving short-term goals without spending the time and money required to produce a formal report. He wondered why JIU had issued only one confidential letter in 1999.

15. He would like to know what was meant by the reference to "more adequate resources" in the last sentence of paragraph 19. He also asked why the Unit had been represented at a meeting of representatives of internal audit services (para. 28), since it was an external oversight body, and what it had learned from the experience. Lastly, he said that the system of follow-up on the Unit's reports and recommendations, which the Committee had approved the preceding year, was a major step towards improving the effectiveness of United Nations oversight. He was disappointed, however, that relatively little had been done thus far to implement the system. Paragraph 32 indicated that the Unit's tracking system would be put in place as soon as possible and he asked whether there was a timetable for the implementation of that system. That was an example of an area in which benchmarks and performance indicators would be useful.

16. Turning to the programme of work of the Unit for 2000 and the preliminary listing of potential reports for 2001 and beyond (A/54/960), he asked why the review of common and joint services in Vienna (para. 2), which had been included in the work programme for 1999, had not been initiated in that year. Regarding the somewhat ambitious plan to conduct reviews of management and administration in both the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (para. 3) and the World Health Organization (WHO) (para. 5) in 2000, he urged the Unit to focus its work more narrowly and to concentrate on addressing pressing issues so as to make the best use of its limited capacity. The forthcoming report on the management of buildings: case study of United Nations Headquarters (para. 11) would be of limited value unless it was issued in sufficient time for the Committee to consider it in conjunction with the report of the Secretary-General on the capital master plan.

17. His delegation attached great importance to the work of JIU, which must be as relevant and effective as possible. In that connection, while participating organizations must give due regard to the Unit's recommendations, JIU must for its part ensure that those recommendations were more action-oriented.

18. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that JIU was to be commended for undertaking ambitious programmes, notwithstanding its limited resources. Regarding the review of management and administration at the United Nations Office at Geneva (A/54/960, para. 10), he said that there was a need for in-depth consideration of the experience of outsourcing before further possibilities in that area were explored.

As to the preliminary listing of potential reports for 2001 and beyond, his delegation would look forward with interest to the review of the financial situation in the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (para. 13 (b)), but it would like to know why that review had not been conducted earlier. Lastly, he wished to know what the review of the reform process in the International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO (para. 14 (h)) would entail.

19. **Mr. Ouedraogo** (Chairman of the Joint Inspection Unit) said that work on the report on the management of buildings: case study of United Nations Headquarters was still ongoing. JIU had taken into account the fact that the Secretariat was preparing its own report on the issue and recognized that the usefulness of the JIU report would depend on its issuance in sufficient time for its consideration side by side with the Secretariat document.

20. He shared the concern expressed at the delays between the submission of JIU reports by participating organizations to their legislative organs and the consideration of those reports by the latter. Much depended, in that regard, on the priorities established by the States members and secretariats concerned. However, when reports were taken up as long as three years after publication, their impact was inevitably diminished, particularly where they addressed ongoing problems.

21. The ten notes issued during the reporting period had concerned the handling of JIU reports by the participating organizations indicated. The notes had been addressed to the secretariats of the organizations, which played an important role in determining when JIU reports were taken up since they drew up the lists of items for consideration by the governing bodies. The exercise would be repeated in 2000 with a view to covering as many organizations as possible. Confidential letters were sent when inspectors came across pressing problems that required immediate decisions by executive heads of participating organizations. It was therefore not possible to plan ahead of time to make more use of such letters.

22. JIU had decided that it would be useful to conduct an evaluation of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) because of the scale of the Programme, the ever growing level of resources involved in combating the pandemic and the need to enhance coordination between UNAIDS and other agencies of the common system. As an external oversight body with a system-wide mandate, JIU was ideally placed to consider the latter issue. Moreover, the Programme's work was closely related to that of WHO, which was the subject of an ongoing JIU review. It should however be borne in mind that the listing of potential reports was tentative and did not necessarily imply that the Unit was committed to taking up those projects.

23. In response to the question posed concerning the high turnover of the Unit's staff, he said that a more important indicator was the vacancy rate. Currently, there was only one vacant post, and the inspectors were satisfied with the new staff members who had joined the Unit. While the Unit had issued only seven reports in 1999, compared with nine in 1998, the total outputs did represent an improvement because more notes had been issued than in the previous reporting period.

24. He concurred with those speakers who had stated that JIU should set an example in terms of efficient use of resources. At the same time, the Unit must have sufficient funds to implement its system-wide mandate effectively. Currently, it sometimes had to limit its reviews of participating organizations to a sample of secretariat units, undermining the credibility of its findings. Also, the Unit had to delay the issuance of reports so as to remain within its budget.

25. With regard to the Unit's representation at the meeting of the representatives of internal audit services of the United Nations organizations and multilateral financial institutions, held in Paris in May 1999, he said that it was important for external oversight bodies such as JIU to maintain contacts with their counterparts working within the organizations of the common system, hence the holding of the Tripartite Oversight Coordination meetings between JIU, OIOS and the Board of Auditors.

26. The system of follow-up on reports of JIU had been approved by the General Assembly in October 1999, less than three months before the end of the reporting period. Thus, it was too soon to report on the results obtained. However, the Unit was committed to the implementation of the system and was seeking to ensure that it was endorsed by the legislative organs of all the participating organizations. JIU recommendations must of course be approved by the legislative organs before their implementation could be

tracked. The States members of the participating organizations must take the initiative in that regard. It was not enough merely to take note of the Unit's reports and leave it to the secretariats to decide on the implementation of JIU recommendations.

27. With regard to the decision to defer the review of common and joint services in Vienna, he emphasized that the Unit's programme of work was subject to change. JIU had issued a report on United Nations common services at Geneva (A/53/787), the second part of which would be before the Committee at the current session. Although OIOS had conducted a review of common services in the United Nations in 1999 which had covered the United Nations Office at Vienna, as well as other duty stations, there remained a need for a review by JIU since the Unit was able, as an external oversight body with a system-wide mandate, to offer a different perspective on many issues.

28. The review of management and administration in UNESCO had been conducted at the request of the Director-General of UNESCO, and a report had been issued within four months of the request. JIU staff had worked closely with the UNESCO secretariat in order to ensure that the Unit's contribution added value to the process of reform under way in UNESCO. The aim of the ongoing review of management and administration in WHO was to consider the recent major management reforms at WHO in the light of the reforms undertaken at other organizations of the common system. The reviews of the financial situation in UNRWA and the reform process in the International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO had been deferred because, as so often happened, other priorities had emerged. In February 2000, for example, shortly after approving its programme of work for the current year, the Unit had received an urgent request for the conduct of a review of management and administration in the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) within the framework of the ongoing reform in ITU.

Agenda item 122: Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (*continued*) (A/C.5/55/2)

29. **Mr. Alimov** (Tajikistan) said that Tajikistan had requested an extension to its current exemption under Article 19 of the Charter through the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly. The country was still reeling from the continuing effects of its destructive civil war and natural disasters, including a severe drought, which had adversely affected crop and livestock yields. According to World Bank estimates, Tajikistan now ranked among the 20 poorest countries in the world. With the monthly salary of the average worker a mere $11, the country's external debt stood at a crushing $1 billion. Poverty and hunger were rampant and one out of every two Tajiks lacked enough to eat.

30. Even though the Government's main concerns were now to provide assistance to the large number of refugees and displaced persons, restore social services and rebuild the housing stock and the economy as a whole, because of the special importance it attached to the United Nations, Tajikistan had over the previous four years paid a total of $960,800 towards its arrears. A large part of those arrears, however, had accrued during the first few years of the civil war, when Tajikistan was still negatively affected by its earlier high assessment rate. The Government was optimistic that the country could achieve lasting peace and sustainable development to enable it to meet its obligations to the United Nations and was currently preparing proposals to pay off its arrears in stages.

31. He wished to point out that, at the time when it had considered Tajikistan's request, the Committee on Contributions had lacked information on the full scope of the drought in the country. Now that the new data had been disseminated, he hoped that Tajikistan's request for an exemption under Article 19 would be given favourable consideration by the Committee so as to permit his country to continue its participation in the work of the Organization.

32. **Mr. Sotirov** (Bulgaria) noted that the appeals by the United Nations and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies for urgent assistance for the population of Tajikistan provided independent confirmation of the seriousness of the situation in that country. While his delegation agreed that States must comply with their obligations under the Charter, Tajikistan's failure to do so was due to conditions beyond its control. It therefore supported that country's request for an exemption under Article 19.

33. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic), **Mr. Lozinski** (Russian Federation), **Mr. Vantsevich** (Belarus) and **Mr. Ivashchenko** (Ukraine) said that, in the light of the information presented by the representative of Tajikistan, they supported that country's request for an exemption under Article 19.

34. **Ms. Hassan** (Somalia) noted that it was the first time in 10 years that a representative of Somalia was taking the floor in the Committee. Her country was in the process of establishing a Government and would in due course and through the proper channels submit a request for an exemption under Article 19 supported by the relevant documentation.

35. **The Chairman** expressed the Committee's satisfaction at seeing Somalia's seat in the Committee once again occupied.

36. **Ms. Aragon** (Philippines) said that her delegation supported Tajikistan's request. The requests of the Comoros and Sao Tome and Principe also merited favourable consideration.

37. **Mr. Aboud** (Comoros) requested that consideration of the item be resumed in informal consultations that afternoon.

38. **Mr. Al-Atrash** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that, while all Member States were obligated to honour their commitments to the Organization, account must also be taken of the special circumstances in which some States found themselves. He believed that the conditions existed for granting an exemption to Tajikistan under Article 19 of the Charter. At the same time, he wished to point out that a number of African States were suffering from similar problems and therefore also deserved exemptions. The question should be more fully explored in informal consultations.

39. **Mr. Chandra** (India) said that his delegation supported Tajikistan's request, given the independent confirmation of the seriousness of the situation in that country. He looked forward to a fuller discussion of the matter in informal consultations.

40. **Ms. Achouri** (Tunisia) said that, while her delegation agreed on the need for mechanisms to prevent delays in the payment of dues to the Organization, there were often good reasons why Member States were sometimes unable to fulfil their obligations. Her delegation therefore shared the reservation expressed by some members of the Committee on Conferences regarding the overall consistency of that Committee's recommendations in response to the seven requests for exemptions under Article 19. It believed that the Committee should also respond favourably to the requests of the Comoros and of Sao Tome and Principe.

41. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that, while it was important to stress the legal obligation of Member States to pay their assessed contributions in full and on time, the General Assembly must also carefully consider the cases of those States whose failure to pay their assessments was due to conditions beyond their control. Her delegation considered that the recommendations of the Committee on Contributions lacked overall consistency and should be reviewed.

42. **Mr. Rysmendiev** (Kyrgyzstan) said that the economy of his country, like that of Tajikistan, was in transition. Kyrgyzstan was therefore familiar with the difficulties that had forced Tajikistan to request an exemption under Article 19 and supported that country's request.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.